

and not have the negative attitude towards the President's proposals that, unfortunately, we had in the last year.

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RETURN ELIAN GONZALEZ TO HIS FATHER

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mrs. BIGGERT). Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from California (Ms. LEE) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. LEE. Madam Speaker, I recently returned from Cuba with the gentlewoman from California (Ms. WATERS) and had the chance, while in Cuba, to talk with many people regarding Elian Gonzalez.

As a trained social worker, as a mother, and as a grandmother, my concern is that the child be in a loving environment, free of abuse. My concern is for his well-being, his mental and physical health and that he has a stable family environment.

We met with Mr. Juan Gonzalez, Elian's father, and his great grandmother and other members of his family. This meeting and discussions with many people in Cuba who know the family have convinced me unequivocally that Elian does have a loving, fit, and equipped family, and that he should be returned to his father immediately.

There is no way that a child should not be with his or her parents because of material things that we value in this country. In our own country, for example, 18.9 percent of our children under 18 live in poverty. In Florida, 22.3 percent of the children live in poverty. In my own home state of California, over 23 percent of California's children live in poverty. I say this to say that we cannot evaluate Elian's situation in material terms because there is nothing more valuable than the love of a father and the support of a family unit.

Now, I am greatly concerned that, in addition to the traumatic experiences of losing his mother, being shipwrecked, and nearly losing his own life, that Elian is now caught in an international custody battle. The constant barrage of questioning, interviews, protests, and the relentless exposure to the media, that has really only exacerbated the already extremely stressful and disorienting circumstances. Elian's health and his welfare must be our first priority. We must consider the potentially damaging and adverse impact of all of this negative activity.

I urge for Elian's expeditious return to his family, his father, his community, and his familiar environment. It is my fear that the longer that this battle continues, the more Elian and his family will be harmed emotionally. The decision of whether to return Elian to his family in Cuba should not be a political decision. It should be a decision that exclusively supports the best interest of the child and his need to be reunited with his father.

The time that I spent with Elian's father and his family has assured me in

no uncertain terms that this reunification is a moral imperative and the right thing to do. I am appalled by the manner in which the rights of Elian's father, Mr. Gonzalez, continue to be threatened. To continue this policy which excludes Elian's father from participation in his son's life in his home sets a very dangerous precedent.

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In no way would we allow our young people who do not have a lot of material things at home to be placed in homes that have more wealth. That is just unacceptable.

Please, let us do the right thing for Elian and please let us send him back home to his father and his family.

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PRESIDENT'S STATE OF THE UNION ADDRESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mrs. BIGGERT). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 1999, the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. WELDON) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Mr. WELDON of Pennsylvania. Madam Speaker, tonight, as I sit in the Chamber with our colleagues, it will be my 14th opportunity and honor to sit in this room as the President of the United States delivers the State of the Union address for this Nation for the year 2000, the beginning of the new millennium.

I have had the pleasure of sitting through speeches by Ronald Reagan, by George Bush and, most recently, by President Clinton. We are going to hear a lot tonight, and I want to talk tonight about some of the things that we will likely hear and will not hear, and I want to talk about some foreign policy issues relative to a trip that I had the pleasure of leading with a bipartisan delegation of Members in November of last year to Russia.

Madam Speaker, what we know we are going to hear tonight, because of the huge surplus that is being generated with our economic upturn and the balanced budget that we are now in the midst of securing, we are going to hear the President basically recreate Christmas all over again. The American people will hear litany after litany of new programs, new ideas, new ways to spend money that has been generated because of our surplus.

And, believe me, Madam Speaker, there is going to be something for everyone. There will be a new program for everyone in the country. And Madam Speaker, it kind of amazes me because the American people have to understand, they can send us any amount of money they want, and we will find a way to spend it in Washington. But is that really what we are here for? Is our goal here to find new ways to create new programs with fancy sounding titles, with new bureaucracies, that are for the most part run by political appointees that are going to better tell the people locally

how to run their lives or better solve the problems locally than if we gave the money back to the American people and then let them make those basic and fundamental decisions?

Believe me, tonight, if there is one thing we know we will hear it will be a Christmas tree list of goodies that the President wants to give out all across this Nation. And he will try to hit every group in America there is. Every group.

Madam Speaker, we have done some good things over the past 6 years. And, yes, many of them have been with the bipartisan effort in this body and the other body. But, yes, some of the times we have had to fight the administration every step of the way.

I can recall when the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. KASICH), our distinguished Committee on the Budget chairman, first proposed balancing the budget 6 years ago. The President got caught and he did not know what to say. In fact, I remember the famous commercials where he would say we are going to balance the budget in 8 years, 7, 6, 5, 4. He really did not know because he had no plan. The gentleman from Ohio (Mr. KASICH) stuck his neck out and said we will submit a plan for a balanced budget, when no one else believed him, including some on the Republican side. The gentleman from Ohio persevered and eventually we accomplished what many thought was impossible.

Now, the President will take credit for the balanced budget. But in fact if we look back over the past 7 years, I can recall a couple of years where the President's budget he submitted to us got no votes in the House. Not one vote. Because no Member from either side would support the President's budget plan. Yet tonight President Clinton will take credit for the balanced budget that we are now enjoying which has helped to promoted our economic success.

Our Congress, our leadership here, with the support of some Democrats, has tried to give back as much money from the surplus as possible to the American people. But here the President has fought us every step of the way. He has rather desired to keep the money in Washington where the bureaucracy can better decide how to spend funds than allowing the American people to get that money back for themselves. There are some in this city who think that the money we collect from the taxpayers of America really is our money as opposed to their money.

Here tonight we will hear the President talk about welfare reform. What we will not hear about tonight, Madam Speaker, is the President saying that he made a mistake twice and vetoed the welfare reform bill. Because two times over the past 7 years the Congress, bipartisan, Democrats and Republicans, passed welfare reform in both bodies. Two times. And in both of those cases the President vetoed welfare reform.